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the five bodies



There's more to us than just the flesh of our physical being. **Lila Conway** looks at the yogic understanding of our subtle bodies and the importance of balance within.

Yoga is an inner journey of spiritual realisation. Within each one of us lies a divine core that never leaves, but quietly remains latent. The yogic path guides us on a journey from our outermost layer, the physical body, to the core of our innermost Being, the Divine Soul. The aim of yoga is to realise our inner divinity and ultimately our connection with the divine as a whole. Through harmonising the layers of our being, naturally the inner divinity shines out – unimpeded.

Most of us perceive our 'body' as simply being the physical form of flesh, bones and organs. Yogis see this as just the outermost layer, or the Annamaya Kosha. According to yoga we have five layers or sheaths (koshas) which when working in harmony with each other gives a deep sense of balance, contentment and wholeness. This is what we mean by holistic health, we are integral beings and true health is when the subtle layers of our being are resonating with each other in harmony. If there is an imbalance on one layer (e.g. emotionally), this imbalance manifests through the other layers too. For example, an outburst of negative emotions will agitate the mind, affect the breath, and physically strain the nervous system.

According to yoga, we have five bodies, layers or 'koshas'. Imagine a Russian doll – you remove one layer and another body lies within... similarly our five bodies are like layers nested within each other. Beyond the physical body (Annamaya kosha), we have four subtle bodies or koshas. These include our energy body (Pranamaya kosha), our mental body (Manomaya kosha), our intellectual body (Vijnanamaya kosha) and ultimately our divine core, the blissful or soul body (Anandamaya kosha). We should understand the five bodies or koshas as layers merging together, just like the coloured layers of a rainbow blend to form one rainbow.

The practice of yoga teaches us to take advantage of this precious gift of life. We begin to really understand that life is

a journey of discovery and realisation that our soul is immortal and ever blissful. Practicing yoga in the correct way, with the right attitude brings about radical changes in our life. We begin to see that the body, mind and soul are not something separate from each other. What manifests in the mind, e.g. worries, negative thoughts, will also surface on the physical level too. Through the physical body (asanas) and breath (pranayama) we can also balance the energy body (Pranamaya kosha). In simple terms your thoughts affect your breath and vice versa. When the breath is controlled, the mind is also controlled. When the mind remains unagitated and is still, like the waters of a lake, we can then see clearly and the bliss within shines forth. The intellectual body (Vijnanamaya kosha) is the body of higher thought and wisdom. The bliss body (Anandamaya kosha) is the deepest most subtle layer, it is never changing, always blissful and peaceful. When the waters of the mind are still we can see the beautiful gem at the bottom of the lake... that gem is our true nature, we are all part of one universal reality.

Deep within each living being is a spark of divinity, pure existence, knowledge and bliss absolute. Ananda is bliss. Yoga unites us with the gem in our soul that is always there, but often undiscovered. The beauty and joys of life are buried within our soul. In the quest for peace and happiness don't look outside of yourself... peel back the layers as the treasures lie within.

Lila Conway is a yoga teacher in the UK, and also regularly spends time teaching and serving within Sivananda ashrams worldwide. For more information about her yoga classes and retreats, visit: www.yogaprema.org

voice is more important than another." Narada Bhakti Yoga Sutras

